Suppose I disagree with you — say, on whether I have the right to bear arms. I favor, you oppose. (We're just supposing here.) In the heat of online argument, I call you a scoundrel or other unkind things. I am intemperate but avoid libel or threats. Should I be jailed? (Remember, we're just supposing here. Don't call the constables!)

You and I would say “No.” But we can't take our freedom of intemperate speech for granted, or our freedom of any speech at all that ruffles the feathers of rulers like those currently ruling the roost in Virginia.

Our forefathers understood the danger of abusing power to squelch dissent. Hence the First Amendment’s sweeping protection of even obnoxious peaceful speech.

Yet right after launching a massive assault on our Second Amendment rights, Virginia legislators are now launching a massive assault on our First Amendment rights. House Bill 1627 would make a Class 1 felony of “Harassment by computer”: “threats and harassment,” “indecent language,” “any suggestion of an obscene nature” when directed against the governor or other Virginia potentates in state government. Possible penalties include jail time.

Who will decide when rhetoric is mean and vulgar, blunt and honest, or some jumble of all the above? Or when the bill’s ambiguous catchall provisions, if enacted, are being violated?

Why, the only* people it's meant to protect: those in government . . . who don’t like it when the people get angry and loud.

This legislation does not defend you and me. It’s the opposite of the First Amendment, designed to keep us plebs — the riffraff — silent.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.

* The special protection pointedly covers only “the following officials or employees of the Commonwealth: the Governor, Governor-elect, Lieutenant Governor, Lieutenant Governor-elect, Attorney General, or Attorney General-elect, a member or employee of the General Assembly, a justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia, or a judge of the Court of Appeals of Virginia.”